

# COMMUNITY ISSUES

# 3

## Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of issues and concerns that were important to the community, a series of public meetings, community surveys, interviews and other exercises were conducted throughout the planning process.

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee used the results of these activities to identify and prioritize the most important community issues before developing strategies to address them.

It is important to note at the outset most people are very pleased with the overall quality of life in Stonington and some residents did not offer any opinion on how things could be improved in the community. In fact, 92 percent of residents rate the overall quality of life in Stonington as good or very good.

*“It is really the community itself which must try to pull together ... in order to preserve those things that the community values and to foster the growth and change that the community wants.”*

Russell Peterson  
Former EPA Director

**Workshop Meetings**



**Public Meetings**



**Telephone Survey**



**Working Meetings**



*Residents clearly value Stonington’s open spaces as well as scenic and historic character.*

## **Things to Encourage ...**

At a meeting early in the planning process, residents were asked to identify things in Stonington that they were particularly proud of.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that make their community special to them and things they would like to encourage in the future.

	<b>“Prouds” in Stonington</b>	<b>Votes</b>
<b>Open Space</b>	Barn Island, river parks, preserved open space, village greens, nature trails, and farmland.	<b>122</b>
<b>Community Facilities</b>	Police Station, community centers, schools, libraries, Town Hall, fire departments, transfer station	<b>90</b>
<b>Unique Facilities</b>	Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic Seaport, Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center, Mystic Information Center	<b>65</b>
<b>Villages / Neighborhoods</b>	Mystic, Pawcatuck, Stonington Borough, Mason’s Island	<b>50</b>
<b>Coastal Resources</b>	Harbors, coves, lighthouses, public access, boating, fishing, scenery, waterfront homes, Town Docks, marinas	<b>46</b>
<b>Community Character</b>	Variety: urban, rural, suburban; mills, farms, scenery, history	<b>42</b>

**Open Space**



**Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center**



## Things to Discourage ...

---

Residents were also asked to identify things in Stonington that they were particularly sorry about.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that concern them about their community and its direction and things they would like to discourage in the future.

*Residents also expressed desire for improved transportation facilities, diverse housing opportunities and appropriate economic development.*

	<b>“Sorrys” in Stonington</b>	<b>Votes</b>
<b>Transportation Issues</b>	RT 1, RT 2, RT 27 (development, traffic, intersections), I-95, Amtrak, Casino traffic, truck traffic, bridges, lack of bikeways, paths, mass transit, wheelchair access, village parking.	<b>157</b>
<b>Residential Patterns</b>	Too many large homes, trailer parks, lack of affordable and elderly housing, high-density housing, housing blight, sprawl	<b>46</b>
<b>Business Patterns</b>	Strip centers, Exit 90 area, lack of business sites, need businesses for taxes and jobs, no industrial parks, overdeveloped tourism, poor shopping, scattered commercial development, underutilized industrial buildings, vacant factory outlets	<b>39</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	Sewage treatment plants, overhead wires, cell towers, lack of sewers expansion, limited DSL service	<b>50</b>
<b>Community Character</b>	Mechanic Street blight, sprawl, Monsanto mill, bright lights, business infringing on neighborhoods, too much construction	<b>30</b>

**New Home Under Construction**



**Trailer Park**



*Residents overwhelmingly identified Conservation Issues as the most important theme for inclusion in the Plan, which is consistent with the value that residents place in Stonington's open spaces and community character*

## **Things to Focus On ...**

---

In other exercises, residents were asked to identify the top issues they were concerned about that might be addressed in a Plan of Conservation and Development.

In one exercise at a public meeting in October 2002, residents were asked to identify, from a list of topics typically addressed in a Plan, the issues most important to them. These results were compared with the results of a random sample telephone survey of Stonington residents in November 2003.

### **Primary Issues**

	<b>Source</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Open Space</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>26%</b>

Preserving open space was the most important issue to residents attending the public meetings. The telephone survey confirmed this sentiment with the following results.

<b>Open Space</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Response</b>
Stonington should preserve more open space.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>61%</b>
Stonington should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>78%</b>
Stonington should require open space as part of every new development.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>77%,</b>
Would pay \$50 more per year in taxes, to have the Town acquire more open space.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>51%</b>

**Open Space**



## Major Secondary Issues

	Source	Percent
<b>Education</b>	Telephone Survey	19%
<b>Taxes</b>	Telephone Survey	18%
<b>Natural Resources</b>	Public Meeting	15%
<b>Business Development</b>	Public Meeting	12%

In the telephone survey, residents identified education and taxes as issues they were concerned about. More than half of all residents surveyed (55%) felt that taxes in Stonington were too high for the level and quality of services provided by the Town, while two-fifths (39%) thought taxes were about right.

At the public meetings, residents wanted to protect natural resources and encourage business development (primarily to reduce the residential tax burden).

While protecting natural resources was a major issue for residents attending public meetings, almost three quarters of residents surveyed by telephone felt that Stonington is doing a good job protecting natural resources. This may reflect an overall concern about the perception of development and possible future impacts.

Business development was an important issue identified by residents. The telephone survey results tabulated below confirm these mixed feelings.

Business Development	Source	Response
Stonington could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development in town.	Telephone Survey	64%
The area surrounding Route 2 at I-95 should be developed with a variety of commercial uses.	Telephone Survey	55%
Stonington should encourage a variety of uses in village areas.	Telephone Survey	75%
Stonington should create flexible regulations to encourage historic mill development.	Telephone Survey	67%
The Town should work with the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic Seaport, and other organizations on projects for everyone's mutual benefit.	Telephone Survey	91%

While the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration and Mystic Seaport are tax-exempt institutions, residents clearly recognize their importance to the local economy, community character and quality of life.

## Other Secondary Issues

Community character was another planning issue areas identified as important by residents. A number of factors can influence community character such as development patterns, historic resources and scenic resources. The survey confirms residents' strong feelings towards protecting community character.

Other issues considered by residents to have some importance included pedestrian and bicycle circulation, historic resources, over-development, and village enhancement.

<b>Community Character</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Response</b>
Stonington is doing a good job protecting historic resources.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>86%</b>
Stonington should do more to protect scenic resources.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>72%</b>
The Town should do more to protect scenic stone walls, street trees and barns.	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>69%</b>
	<b>Source</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Community Character</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Pedestrian/Bicycle Circulation</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Historic Resources</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Over-Development</b>	<b>Telephone Survey</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Village Enhancement</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>5%</b>

**Community Character**



### Tertiary Issues

Other issues that were of concern to residents included vehicular circulation, housing needs community facilities, utilities, and residential development.

	Source	Percent
<b>Vehicular Circulation</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Housing Needs</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Community Facilities</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Residential Development</b>	<b>Public Meeting</b>	<b>3%</b>

### Age-Restricted Housing



## Overall Plan Direction

---

### Overall Philosophy

Based on public meeting exercises, Steering Committee input, and the results of the random telephone survey, the overall guiding philosophy of this Plan is to:

**Protect and enhance  
Stonington's community character and  
high quality of life.**

### Themes

To accomplish this goal, the Plan has been organized under the following themes.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Components</b>
<b>Protect Important Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preserve open space</li><li>• Protect natural resources</li><li>• Conserve coastal resources</li><li>• Protect historic resources</li><li>• Preserve scenic resources</li></ul>
<b>Protect and Enhance the Villages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reinforce village development patterns</li><li>• Re-use the mills</li></ul>
<b>Guide Appropriate Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve residential development patterns</li><li>• Address changing housing needs</li><li>• Protect existing neighborhoods</li><li>• Guide appropriate business development</li><li>• Address the impacts and needs of institutional uses</li><li>• Support desired development patterns</li></ul>
<b>Address Community Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address community facility needs</li><li>• Ensure a safe and efficient transportation system</li></ul>